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GOLDEN PATH



A NOVELLA

by

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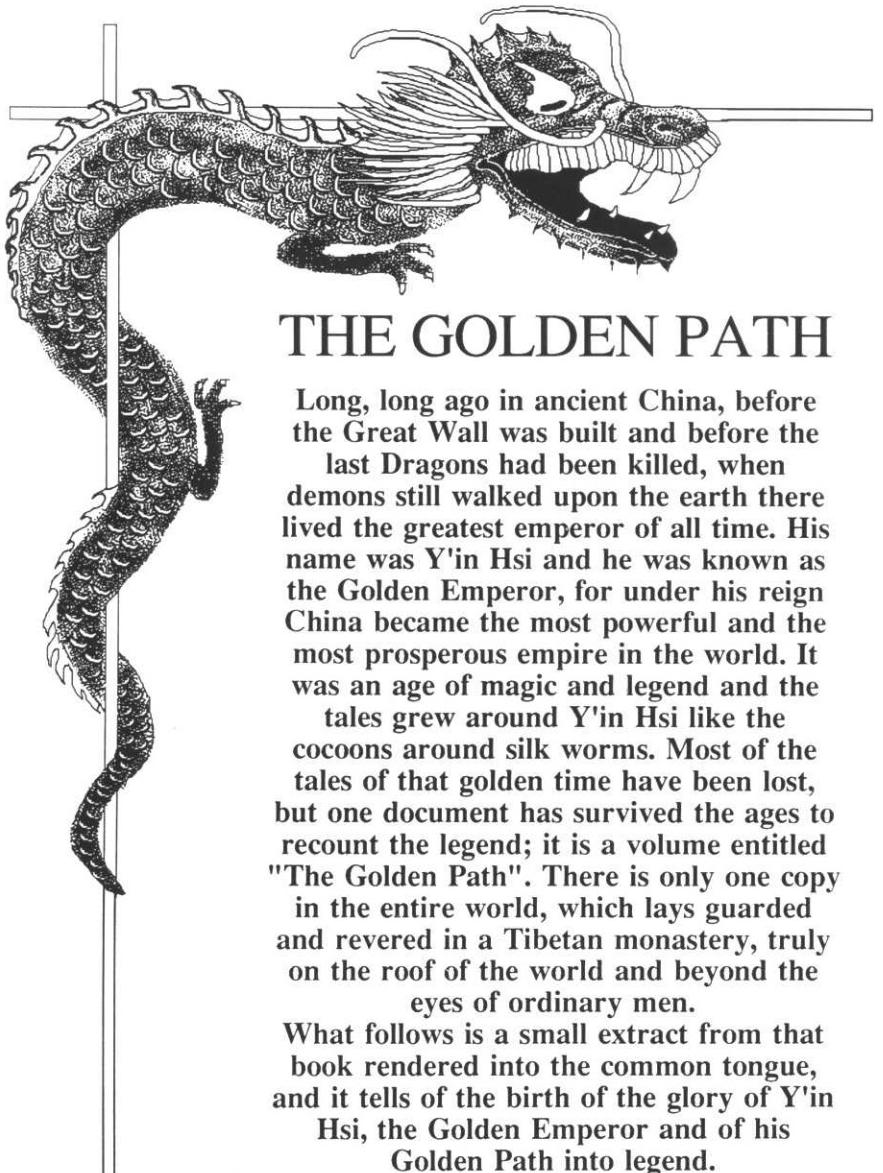
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THE GOLDEN PATH

Long, long ago in ancient China, before the Great Wall was built and before the last Dragons had been killed, when demons still walked upon the earth there lived the greatest emperor of all time. His name was Y'in Hsi and he was known as the Golden Emperor, for under his reign China became the most powerful and the most prosperous empire in the world. It was an age of magic and legend and the tales grew around Y'in Hsi like the cocoons around silk worms. Most of the tales of that golden time have been lost, but one document has survived the ages to recount the legend; it is a volume entitled "The Golden Path". There is only one copy in the entire world, which lays guarded and revered in a Tibetan monastery, truly on the roof of the world and beyond the eyes of ordinary men.

What follows is a small extract from that book rendered into the common tongue, and it tells of the birth of the glory of Y'in Hsi, the Golden Emperor and of his Golden Path into legend.



The stone beneath Y'in Hsi felt cold and hard but he gave it no thought, he had been waiting for hours through the night and his attention was fixed solely on the distant horizon. The high parapet on which he sat afforded a perfect view of the landscape that fell for miles before the monastery, but in the pitch black of the starless night he could only make out the dark and distant shapes of the Limpo Mountain range. Gradually though, as Y'in Hsi watched, the peaks of the mountains became outlined with soft tongues of fire that flickered and danced from peak to peak. In an instant the flames thickened and ran in a solid line, then burst across the landscape as the sun rose majestically over the range. In a heartbeat the world was once more bathed in pastel colours and Y'in Hsi thought that he would never again see anything so beautiful.

It was no ordinary day for Y'in Hsi. This was his sixteenth birthday, the day on which novices, if they were acceptable, were initiated fully into the brotherhood. He had stayed awake through the night to watch the dawn and not miss a single moment of the day, the most important of his life and he smiled as he stood to perform the ritual greeting of the sun. A light breeze blew from the mountains, warm now from the sun, ruffling his jet black hair. Y'in Hsi sang with it, his heart full. He had no doubt that he would be accepted into the brotherhood; his whole life had led up to this day and Y'in Hsi felt utterly prepared. He knew that the monastery would soon be stirring, and the great brass bell would boom shortly, summoning the monks and novices to morning meditation. Leaning over the stone wall he savoured these last moments to himself - his last as a novice and his last day as a boy.

His gaze swept over the vast landscape and he sighed gently

for he had never been outside the monastery. His earliest memories were within its great stone walls for novices were never allowed to pass through the gate to the outside. As a monk, if he earned the privilege, he would be allowed to travel to the village that lay under its shadow, but such visits were very rare and restricted to the senior of the brotherhood. Y'in Hsi's heart was torn. On the one hand he desperately wanted to be a monk, but on the other he would like to see some of the world, just once. He turned from the wall as the bell sounded from the high tower and at once smiled again. This was his day, he was to become a man and a monk and he ran shouting through the dormitory shaking the sleeping novices awake and hurried down to the hall of meditation.

An hour later he moved silently across the courtyard. He had been summoned to the chief monk's room and his stomach was fluttering with anticipation. He had changed into his best white novices' robe, and his long black hair had been plaited into a single neat strand. The air was heavy with the scent of sandalwood and lotus blossom as he entered the inner sanctum. Y'in Hsi walked very slowly across the polished walnut floor of the temple, his figure casting strange shadows from the hundreds of burning candles and his rope sandals making hardly a sound. The air was still and heavy with an atmosphere of mystery and solemnity. Y'in Hsi held his breath, fearful of disturbing the almost magical tranquility. As he entered the inner sanctum he bowed low before the chief monk and then sank to his knees with his arms outstretched. The elderly man was sitting cross legged in the centre of the room. Flanked by two enormous candelabras the ancient sage sat cross legged in the centre of the room. His eyes were shut as if in deep meditation. Opening them he beckoned Y'in Hsi to sit before him.

"You have reached your sixteenth birthday today Y'in Hsi, and

are now entitled to join our brotherhood fully, to exchange your white robe for the black of our order. I have taught you in every aspect of our religion, both spiritual and physical for thirteen years, and you have surpassed our highest expectations."

Y'in Hsi was shocked, for words such as these were unheard of, and he had never had such praise. Surely his initiation was now certain.

"But before you commit yourself to our brotherhood, there is one final lesson you must learn. This I cannot teach you for you must find the answer within yourself."

Y'in Hsi was puzzled by the old monk's words and waited eagerly for him to continue.

"There is a province near here called Kuanu. It is a place infested with bandits, and peopled with poor and oppressed peasants. It was not always this way; the province was once the most peaceful and beautiful in all of China and was ruled wisely and with compassion by a young Lord named T'ang Yin."

The warmth of the afternoon sun combined with the sweet fragrance of the lotus blossom and the hypnotic effect of the monk's voice seemed to have a strange effect on Y'in Hsi. He closed his eyes and as the monk's soft voice continued he found that pictures formed in his mind, giving a vivid image of the story almost as if he was there. And gradually the monk's voice changed so that it sounded as if different voices were speaking.

T'ang Yin paced the length of the room with deliberate and angry movements, his fists clenched tightly by his sides. The soldier standing by the large stone table watched him nervously. Suddenly T'ang Yin smashed his fist down on the table causing an outstretched parchment to fly in the air and roll up with a dry rustle.

"The audacity of Ch'un Kuei! How dare he so openly attack our

borders?" He looked at the soldier, who fidgeted uneasily.
"You may go now, get some sleep, I think you're going to need it."

The soldier gratefully left T'ang Yin alone, gazing across the valley to the mountains beyond. His face wore a bitter and strained look that made him look older than his forty years. He had heard reports all week of raids on his outlying villages, but the news he had just received from the east was the worst. At first he had thought it was just the unconnected activities of bandits on the rampage and hadn't been too disturbed. There was always a small amount of hostile activity somewhere in the province. But as the reports increased a clear pattern had begun to emerge. These were not the activities of untrained bandits, but a planned campaign of destruction from highly trained and efficient soldiery. His people were starting to panic and T'ang Yin knew he had to do something about it, and do it soon. He knew who was behind the attacks and his mouth drew into a grim line as he thought of the warlord Ch'un Kuei. The man was a savage, unfit to rule a pack of wolves let alone a Chinese province. His army had been drawn from the dregs of humanity, any cut-throat or murderer was welcome within its ranks. Whereas T'ang Yin used his troops to keep the peace and protect his people, Ch'un Kuei used his forces to seize lands, property and wealth. His peoples were oppressed and his neighbours lived in constant fear. Ch'un Kuei had not dared to openly attack T'ang Yin's province up to now, but his greed and his army had grown strong over the years and he grew bolder by the day. When T'ang Yin had come to power his province was not the wealthy and settled state that it was today. It was a backward and underdeveloped province, but T'ang Yin saw its potential and determined to make it the finest in the land. T'ang Yin had not had the usual pampered upbringing of a Chinese heir,

but had been sent by his father to study for a year with the Buddhist monks in Kuan Shu province an experience which affected him deeply. He became very unhappy with the state of his province and studied hard to learn the skills he would need to forge it anew into a land of prosperity and culture. He journeyed all over his land making punishing treks into the mountainous outer regions, where few dared to venture. His body became an instrument of his will, fearless, resolute and capable of standing the harshest punishment. Within five years of T'ang Yin's rule the province began to show the first fruits of his guidance but it took fifteen years to accomplish the peace and prosperity for which he had striven so hard.

Thanks to his efforts, the farms became more efficient and poverty and starvation became a thing of the past. People everywhere grew more prosperous, even the beggars had gone and T'ang Yin's troops drove bandits and thieves beyond his borders. The dragons that had plagued the villagers were dealt with and banished far away to the mountains, and through strict observance to the Gods and their laws there were few reports of evil demons. T'ang Yin commissioned a magnificent temple to the Gods, with beautiful and intricate carvings depicting the peace and harmony throughout his land. Statues were wrought of solid gold, inlaid with jewels and precious stones and the fame of his temple spread over all China.

Ch'un Kuei had his eye on his neighbour's wealth and clearly felt that the lamb was ready for slaughter. T'ang Yin had heard reports that the old warlord was finding it increasingly hard to keep his brood of war hungry sons in check. They were worried about equal shares in his wealth when he died, so Ch'un Kuei was dealing with the problem by acquiring other peoples' territories for them, and what could be better than picking the richest and ripest fruit of all. T'ang Yin once more

slammed his fist on the table.

"Damn him!" he cried, and resumed pacing his room, his forehead creased with worry. A deep, hollow gong sounded and the door to his room opened. As T'ang Yin turned the creases lifted from his face and he smiled broadly as his two year old son ran unsteadily into the room. Y'in Hsi was T'ang Yin's only son and had become the focus of his life - he gave all his efforts renewed purpose and meaning. He was creating the perfect state as an inheritance for his son, but unless he could drive the mighty Chun Kuei back across his borders it would be a very different sort of province. A province that he would never come to inherit. T'ang Yin sighed and led his son back to the care of his nurse. He then called a meeting of his closest counsellors and generals and gave them the latest news.

"I want to meet this threat head on," stated T'ang Yin as he paced the ornate rug and addressed his advisors.

"I don't want Ch'un Kuei to get any further into my province and I want protection for my outlying and exposed villages."

One of the more experienced captains spoke up,

"If we make an example of Ch'un Kuei and annihilate his forces, it will make any other ambitious barbarian think twice before attempting to invade our lands."

It was agreed by all that this was their common objective and the rest of the evening was spent calculating the size of the army that T'ang Yin could muster to confront the invasion of Ch'un Kuei.

The warlord had chosen to fight in a way that was hard for T'ang Yin to combat - mountain guerilla warfare. He could never be sure where Ch'un Kuei would attack next, or with what force. Finally, after much discussion, the generals agreed on the size of the force that would go with T'ang Yin and the number that would be left behind to guard the Citadel and Palace. The

long years of peace had meant that few of T'ang Yin's army had real battle experience, and those who had were old and would find the trek east into the mountains a great trial. T'ang Yin tried to stifle the doubts that he felt rising to the surface of his mind and hoped that the training he had received from the monks would now stand him in good stead.

Early next morning T'ang Yin woke from a fitful sleep. Shivering in the morning chill he rose and walked to the window, gazing once more at the spectacular view from the palace. Since he was a boy he loved to watch the sun rise over the mountains and flood the valley with light. This morning the beauty of the scene gave him little solace, for he knew that preparations were going on for war, a war that threatened to destroy his peace, his land and his dreams for the future.

By mid-morning, preparations were well under way and the whole army was amassed in a temporary camp beneath the walls of the palace. T'ang Yin spent an exhaustive day talking to all of his troops, overseeing exercises and building up morale.

The sun was setting, filling his room with a warm glow, before T'ang Yin finally rested while waiting for the generals to arrive for a council of war. He studied the detailed map of his province for the tenth time in as many minutes, then sat back and sighed knowing that the council would not be easy, for the generals looked upon him as young and inexperienced. Many of the veterans didn't see him as a warrior at all, his time with the monks had him branded as a scholar.

He was right, the council wasn't easy. As he outlined his plans for the campaign he was constantly urged by one of his most senior generals, Ko Ying, to take a backseat role in the coming battle, and to let him lead the army and plan the strategies.

"I would suggest my Lord, that you keep out of the direct

action," said Ko Ying with a smirk, "as your father neglected to train you as a warrior. We will not only have a battle to fight but we shall also have to defend your person, my Lord - of course when one is trained as a monk I'm sure one has different abilities."

His tone was sour and sarcastic, and T'ang Yin looked sharply at him, but chose to ignore the insult for the present. His generals were under a lot of pressure and perhaps Ko Ying was expressing real concern for his Lord. The council ended late but the route and marching orders were finally decided and T'ang Yin gained consensus for his plans.

Despite the fact that T'ang Yin had not retired till the early hours of the morning, he still rose before the sun was fully up, and walked through the camp looking at his huddled men as they lay around the spent ashes of the night fires. He searched the sleeping faces until he found the man he wanted, bent and quietly shook awake the soldier who was one of his own bodyguards. After a whispered conversation, the soldier picked up his weapons and bed roll, and walked silently with T'ang Yin back to the palace.

That morning there was almost a holiday atmosphere in the camp. T'ang Yin had declared it to be a day of competition and lines of soldiers formed as they registered for the different contests. They were allowed to enter as many events as they liked in order to show their prowess with spear, bow, sword or bare hands. There was an added incentive to do well for T'ang Yin had offered a purse of gold to the overall supreme warrior. The air was buzzing with conversation and excitement, everyone had an opinion about the combatants and was voicing it loudly to his neighbour.

T'ang Yin walked out of the palace and sat at the edge of the makeshift arena watching the men stretching and warming up. He

was silent and sat uncharacteristically shrouded in a hooded cloak. He was the only one not in high spirits in the whole camp.

"I don't know why he's so unhappy." muttered one of the older soldiers, who had served with T'ang Yin's father.

"Perhaps there's nothing in his books that tells him how to deal with fear!" scoffed another.

"Don't be too sure," warned one of the palace guards who was standing near. "T'ang Yin may spend a lot of time with his books but that doesn't mean he's a coward."

A resounding fanfare of drums heralded the beginning of the contests and crowds of soldiers gathered to watch the events. Each event was kept short so that everyone who entered would have a chance to compete, and blunted weapons were used in order to prevent serious injury. The first 'fatal' blow delivered in each contest decided the victor. By noon most of the soldiers had been eliminated leaving only the most agile and skillful.

One soldier shone out from the others in all events. He wore a scarf wrapped around his head so that only his eyes were showing. Many had tried in the course of the fighting to remove the mask, but none had been successful, and all bets were now on the 'Unknown Soldier' whom nobody seemed to recognize.

"At least we have one true warrior amongst us, eh, my Lord." said Ko Ying who was slightly drunk, "that guard of yours has won every event so far."

T'ang Yin looked searchingly at the general. The man had spent much of the day boasting that he could beat any of the contestants in any of the events.

"But of course General he did not have you to contend with" said T'ang Ying in a soft but steely voice.

"Or yourself my Lord....perhaps because of a temporary indisposition?"

The sarcasm in Ko Ying's voice was a little too apparent. The rice wine he had been drinking had loosened his tongue and unveiled his disloyalty. T'ang Yin rose to his feet and turned to face the general.

"Enough, Ko Ying! You have boasted overmuch today, and I am calling you to account. You will join unarmed combat against this warrior who has vanquished all who have stood against him in the field today. The victor shall have the purse of gold and the respect and admiration of the whole army. Come 'my friend', as you are twice his size and not tired from a day's efforts, you should surely not find it too hard a task?"

Ko Ying leapt to his feet at T'ang Yin's words and the smirk vanished from his face. It would not have been his choice to do as his master bid, but his words left him with no alternative, and he moved towards the arena with an arrogant swagger. The unknown soldier bowed as he entered and there was a sparkle in his dark eyes.

"I am honoured general that you choose to fight this last bout with me."

Ko Ying grunted and rushed to grapple with the warrior. He had entered the arena full of confidence but it wasn't long before his confidence was undermined. As Ko Ying lashed out with his heavy fist or kicked with his longer legs, his unknown opponent evaded the blows with an effortless agility that made him look quite foolish. Again and again this happened, and Ko Ying became more and more angry. Was the impudent fellow daring to toy with him? He jerked out his foot in a powerful kick at the man's stomach, but the unknown soldier deflected the movement, caught his leg and made a slow kick to the general's groin, stopping short just before contact was made.

"I think we should call that the decisive blow eh, General? After all, I wouldn't want to prevent you from riding your horse."

Releasing the general's leg he walked to the side of the ring and stopping in front of the figure of T'ang Yin, bowed slightly and turned to face the cheering throng that had assembled to congratulate him on his overwhelming victory. To the surprise and mounting cheers of his army the hooded figure fell to his knees and the unknown soldier revealed himself as T'ang Yin. He turned to face Ko Ying and raised his voice above the tumult, "See General - the legacy of an education by monks."

At that moment Ko Ying abandoned any fealty he had for T'ang Yin and swore abusively at him. Then turning on his heel, he spoke violently as he strode away.

"Never will I ride with you. It is I who should be leading this army and ruling this land. You will rue the day that you tried to make a fool of Ko Ying"

At these words the palace guard moved to detain the general, but T'ang Yin motioned them to let him pass. As he did so a shadow fell on his face as a large black crow passed across the sun. As T'ang Yin looked up he felt an icy chill sweep through his heart.

"Anyone else who feels the same way as Ko Ying may leave with him." He pulled his cloak around his shoulders and strode back towards the palace, his spirit warmed by the rapturous cheering that accompanied him.

The next day T'ang Yin rode out of the palace grounds followed by a long column of cavalry, foot soldiers and supply wagons. The bright scarlets and blues of their uniforms and the sparkling of their shields and spears matched their exuberant mood. They were confident that they could deal with the invasion and be safely back home before the harsh weather and cold winter snows set in.

T'ang Yin, flanked by two of his generals, reviewed the route he had chosen with them. He had decided to head south through

the flatlands at the centre of his province, then directly eastward to the mountains where Ch'un Kuei's men had last been sighted. At first the route was easy. In the central region the roads had been kept in good repair and the area was flat. The plains were fertile and well-watered and morale was kept high by the encouragement and hospitality of the people.

The tale of the Unknown Warrior had spread far and wide and T'ang Yin had supporters flocking to his standard all along the way. It had been an easy march as they crossed the plains, but now as they advanced into the hills the going became harder and slower. Scouts were sent ahead of the army for they drew closer to the enemy every day. One such party discovered a curious skeleton; the bones were huge, bleached by the sun they shone white and mysterious. The skull of the beast lay smashed as though it had been killed by some even greater monster.

"What kind of beast is this, Lord?" asked the scout who had found the bones.

"This was a true dragon, the rarest of magical beasts. They are very dangerous though few are seen nowadays" said T'ang Yin. "There is a legend that the ground teeth of the dragon are effective against all the manner of demons. That's why the skull has been smashed."

Leaving the strange remains behind them, they wound their way deeper into the mountains; the terrain becoming harder as it grew more beautiful. The Sti Ky mountains were famed throughout China for their beauty and for the honeycomb of caves that ran through them. T'ang Yin had no time to admire the scenery, however. Waterfalls slowed them down and in this area lived mountain lions and worse. But it was nothing so dramatic as a lion that caused the first death during the army's march.

One of the archers had perched himself on a narrow ledge

apart from his comrades, the better to view the spectacular scenery and to eat his rations. He could not know that he occupied the favourite haunt of a mountain goat nor did he hear it rushing down the mountain towards him.

Too late! His friends cried their warning and before he had half-turned to face the danger the goat had knocked him into oblivion. It was but poor revenge that the others shot the creature dead with an arrow which became a memorial supper for the dead man.

It was the first black moment for the whole host, the word spread rapidly among the troops, and the incident was seen as a bad omen, something which took all of T'ang Yin's powers of persuasion to dispel.

T'ang Yin's journey as a novice had often led him along these mountain paths, and the experience was useful now. In the Council of War he had told the generals of a secret canyon, difficult to find, but which offered a short and secure route into the region where he expected to discover, and surprise, Ch'un Kuei. They shortly came to where the entrance was hidden behind thick undergrowth for T'ang Yin had no trouble finding it. Only one mounted man could enter the canyon at a time, squeezing through the huge boulders that guarded the entrance. The whole army had filed through and begun to assemble on the downward slope of the mountain when suddenly there was chaos and panic. A huge explosion echoed around T'ang Yin's army and a hail of rocks and stones bounced and skittered down the sides of the canyon, ricochetting off trees and hurtling towards them. When the dust and noise had subsided T'ang Yin looked toward the entrance of the canyon and his heart sank. It was blocked!

As he spun round to face his men he saw that the renegade general Ko Ying had appeared at the head of a screaming

band of men in animal furs and leather, armed to the teeth and charging up the mountain towards them. Wheeling his horse into action he brandished his sword in the direction of the advancing enemy and urged his men on with a savage battle cry. It was a gruelling challenge to stay on his horse, but T'ang Yin flew at Ch'un Kuei's barbarians with the ferocity of a man possessed. For it was Ch'un Kei with the help of Ko Ying who had prepared the canyon ambush.

T'ang Yin saw his men in the front of the column being pushed back slowly, bewildered by the ambush and the ferocity of the hordes. He saw how well they began to fight, but it was too late. They were being overwhelmed. Ko Ying had found the perfect place for an ambush; with no room to manouver or regroup, the column was being decimated where it stood. T'ang Yin kept fighting, knowing that only a miracle could save him and his men. As he wheeled about dealing blow after blow, one of his palace guards fought to get beside him and urged his lord to save himself.

"If we can't protect you, my Lord, all is not lost. Ch'un Kuei will still have an enemy. If you die here your knowledge dies with you and without that your son will never lead his nation against the devil Ch'un Kuei".

The bitter reality of the situation cut deep into T'ang Yin's pride, but he was a realistic man and he knew it was better to lose this battle than lose his realm forever and he could see that the guard was right. With his intimate knowledge of the area he knew a way to save himself.

"Get togeather as many guards as you can!" he ordered. "When I give the signal, follow me. There is a hidden way out of this valley."

For a few desperate minutes T'ang Yin fought on with his men, then raising his sword high, he darted through the trees to the

sheer cliff wall. For a moment it looked as if he and his followers would dash themselves against the rock, but at the last second T'ang Yin swung from his horse, swerved parallel to the rock-face and disappeared from view. The secret entrance was below ground level and he waited there and handed as many of his men as he could into the caverns below. Finally Ch'un Kuei's men thundered up to the entrance and Tang Yin once again saw the treacherous general Ko Ying in the van of the troops. He didn't wait to cross swords with the traitor, but dived into the cave and prepared to defend the entrance with his men. As he called them together there came a tremendous noise followed by a shock wave that knocked him and his men to the ground. When the roaring stopped, T'ang Yin pushed himself to his feet, slowly shaking his head from side to side, to try and rid himself of the ringing in his ears. It was pitch black in the cave and T'ang Yin wasn't even sure where the entrance had been. They had been sealed inside the mountain.

After a few moments a flame was produced and T'ang Yin surveyed their plight. His men were stunned by the explosion but not hurt. The flickering light from the makeshift torch showed a narrow passage at the back of the cavern and T'ang Yin led the way forward with his men following in a jagged line.

T'ang Yin had some knowledge about the caves but even he had not travelled them extensively. However he did have some grasp of the geography from the hours spent poroing over the maps while planning his campaign. So he knew where to head for and hoped that the perils of the cave would be surmountable. By ripping some of their clothing and using broken spear shafts the band managed to construct makeshift torches and T'ang Yin led them out of the gloomy cavern and into the labyrinth. The caves were incredible in their formation; beautiful and awesome, but they were also cold and damp and there was the constant

sound of dripping water as they moved from cavern to cavern. As T'ang Yin led his men deep into the mountain he had the growing feeling that they were not alone. Their torches flickered, throwing light high into the caverns illuminating the walls and casting strange shadows. As they proceeded they became aware that the light from their torches was becoming dimmer in the glow from a greater light source in the cave ahead. T'ang Yin, fancying he could make out a huge and glowering face set into the far wall, led his men swiftly aside lest they be assailed by some unknown spirit. As they passed through cave after cave, T'ang Yin saw that there were indeed faces carved into the rockface; demonic and altogether unsettling. He hurried his men past for their morale was very low and the tales and myths that told of these caverns were far from pleasant. He unconsciously made the sign against evil and strode as boldly as he dared through to the next cavern. As he entered the cave he heard the clear and welcome sound of running water. A stream cut through the middle of the mountain, rushing and gurgling, and darting through the cold waters were a myriad of shining, silver fish. T'ang Yin's ragged band gave a feeble cheer; here was both food and water.

They spent the next half hour catching fish with their hands and spears and they lit a small fire to cook them on. T'ang Yin called one of his men aside and led him away from the stream. He pulled an ornate key from his pocket and spoke quietly: "I want you to stay here and guard this key, it is important that it does not fall into the hands of Ch'un Kuei and that it is kept for me or my son. No one will find you in these caves without the directions that only I can give, and you will survive here with the fish and water. You must guard this key with your very life, and only when I or someone carrying my ring returns may you surrender it."

The soldier bowed assent to T'ang Yin, and when the rest of the band resumed their journey he stayed behind with only the fish for company.

The party now made good progress, the food had revived their flagging spirits and they forged ahead with full bellies and renewed purpose. T'ang Yin stopped to hide a sacred object along the way, safe until it could be reclaimed. The men had used their excess clothing to make torches, and the penetrating cold was beginning to weaken them. They had to pick their way carefully along the walls as the last of their torches spluttered out, leaving them in complete darkness. Shortly, though, they noticed eddies of fresh air in the passages and their hearts lifted. Fresh air - they were on their way out at last. Soon they saw ahead a patch of light and scrambled cheering toward it. Gratefully they poured from the small entrance and lay in a scattered heap under the bright afternoon sun. They had passed right through the mountain in less time than it took to ride over the pass. T'ang Yin breathed a sigh of relief as he realized that he still had a chance to reach the citadel, and his palace, before Ch'un Kuei.

Moving swiftly along half-forgotten roads to avoid the enemy they made for the safety of the Palace, but towards evening they saw ominous dust-clouds rising behind them. As the riders neared T'ang Yin could see they were an advance party of about twenty scouts. At the fugitives hiding they watched the party strike camp for the night and waited for them to fall asleep. A single silent arrow took care of the guard and T'ang Yin's men moving swiftly, untied the horses and rode swiftly away. They were a good distance clear before they heard the commotion from the camp. T'ang Yin knew that Ch'un Kuei's mercy would be rather less tender than his own and guessed that they would flee into the hills.

The sturdy little horses from the steppes served them well, and they made excellent time. They stopped only to grab a few hours rest and food; everywhere they passed they spread the news of Ch'un Kuei's advance. The people fled into the foothills leaving the villages deserted and barren of food and drink. Finally, T'ang Yin and his exhausted companions crossed the last valley and entered the Citadel. Their arrival caused uproar and panic, for there had been no news of the army and it was clear that disaster had struck.

T'ang Yin headed straight for his State Rooms and called his most trusted advisors.

"The situation is grave," he said softly as he paced the magnificent rug, "We have no option but to prepare for a siege. With our remaining troops we should be able to hold Ch'un Kuei at bay for a while, but we cannot seriously hope to beat him now. We must get as many people as possible out of the citadel before he arrives, which I estimate will be no longer than two days."

He turned and faced his faithful advisors and his stomach twisted. How many, he wondered would survive the coming onslaught? Dismissing them he watched them file slowly out of the room and then called back his oldest and dearest friend, Lu Wang. As they stood looking over the now peaceful valley he asked Lu Wang one last favour.

"My old friend, to you I entrust the future of the province. I want you to take my son Y'in Hsi to the monks of Kuan Shu. No one must know who he is, and Ch'un Kuei must never know that he still lives. When he is old enough he should be told what has happened here, who he really is and of his birthright. He should be given the opportunity to choose his own destiny, whether to take his own path or to become overlord of this province, which I will to him."

T'ang Yin put his arm around the shoulders of the old man and led him to the door.

"Take care Lu Wang, and protect my son as best you can."

As the old man left the room, T'ang Yin sat behind his desk and started to write on a large scroll. Many hours later Lu Wang brought Y'in Hsi to his rooms, dressed warmly in furs and ready to start the long journey to the monastery. T'ang Yin caught Y'in Hsi up in his arms and hugged the little boy to him. Lu Wang's eyes filled with tears at what he knew must be the sight of father and son together for the last time.

"Take the secret passage out of the palace. No one must know that you have gone. Take my ring and keep it with this scroll, they must be given to my son when he reaches maturity..... guard them well."

T'ang Yin hugged his son one last time and then surrendered him with the ring and scroll to his faithful friend. He turned his back as they passed from the rooms and he never saw either of them again.

Y'in Hsi sat still and silent for a long while when the elderly monk finished his tale. His head was spinning as he finally understood the mystery of his past. The sun was now low in the sky but it was not the late afternoon breeze that caused him to shiver.

"What happened to my father?" he asked quietly.

"He died on the Palace steps, sword in hand, a prince and a warrior to the last, Y'in Hsi."

Lu Wang, for it was he, spoke gently, "Ch'un Kuei took the palace by storm, all within were put to the sword, no one survived. The old order of peace and prosperity was replaced by a reign of terror and oppression. That terror still continues and you must now decide whether you will stay here and follow our destiny or leave as your father did. First read this scroll which

your father wrote for you before he died."

Y'in Hsi did not hesitate, he took up the scroll and his father's ring, and so began his journey along the golden path that was to take him into the mists and mysteries of legend, and was to make him the wisest and most powerful emperor in the history of China.

Even as Yin Hsi slipped the ring on his finger, the old monk cried his warning too late.

The magic of the gold band worked its way with him, as he took on T'ang Yin's age and appearance; just as if the son were now the father in burden of years.

Yin Hsi noticed the veil of youth slipping from him as if the passage of time and the very fabric of the universe were in some fiendish conspiracy, while Lu Wang only noticed the momentary shimmering of his bodily outline, as the youth passed through the ageing process of a lifetime to a hastened dotage.

Lu Wang had known of the power of the ring, but had not suspected that the magic would work. His astounded gaze was met by the elderly man standing before him.

"What has happened to me Lu Wang?" croaked the bright eyed but otherwise decrepit creature.

"The ring, Yin Hsi, the ring has taken your vigour and youth and substituted the physical reality of your father exactly as if he were still living. You are to all intents and purposes your fathers' reincarnation; and are now bound to his earthly body until you can win the wisdom which will restore to you your realm and your youth.

"How shall I ever gather enough strength to carry such a burden as this?" the unfortunate gaspingly demanded of the old monk.

"You must follow the Golden Path of enlightenment you first chose," replied Lu Wang, "for it is this and this alone which will now determine your fate; and besides you have the scroll, The

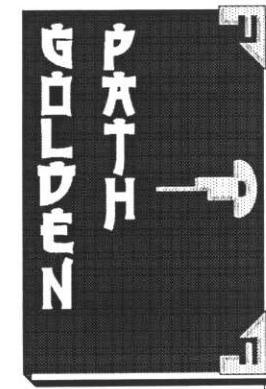
Book of Knowledge to help you on your way. In spite of everything you must persevere at all times - and use all manner of advantage which the benign powers will cast in your way"

The two men faced each other for a long time. Many thoughts were in their minds, but they did not speak their farewells.

Instead, gripping each other by the shoulders, they looked intently into the others eyes: one the boy in an old mans' body, the other the sage; and both knew, as they had for many years, that their love for each other would endure.

Slowly, and with no words spoken between them, Yin Hsi and Lu Wang turned away from each other, the monk to the monastery, the bewitched youth to his destiny.

It had begun.



Loading Instructions

Set up the system as described in your computer instruction manual. Place the first of your two disks into the disk drive with side A uppermost, and switch on the system. Follow the instructions the system then gives you.

DO NOT SWITCH THE SYSTEM OFF WHEN THE DISC IS BEING ACCESSED AS THIS COULD DAMAGE THE DISC.

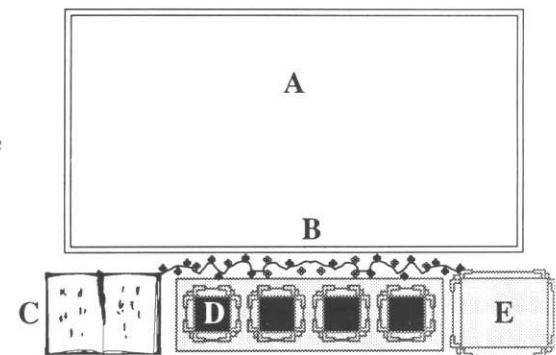
The following control instructions are for the Atari ST. Owners of other computers should refer to the key-guide provided for their particular computer.

How to play

On the road to enlightenment you will encounter many different situations which you must use your cunning to overcome. Like all adventures it pays to make a map, and if you think you are stuck then experiment with what is around you. The Book of Paths will hold some clues for you.

Screen Layout

- A - Playing Screen
- B - Vine
- C - Book of Knowledge
- D - Empty pockets
- E - The Path
(small screen)



Control of the Monk

The mouse directly controls the position of a Chinese symbol on the screen. This is your pointer.

When the left button of the mouse is pressed the monk will walk towards the pointer until he is near it. When the monk has a choice of paths he will take the high path if the pointer is above his head and the low path if it is lower. The best way to move the monk around is to position the cursor to beyond where you want the monk to go, without pressing the buttons, then hold down the left button.

e.g. To leave a screen for another location place the pointer in the appropriate margin to the left or right of the main screen, and hold down the left button.

To put down or pick up an object, move the pointer onto the monk's body and hold down the left button.

To transfer an object from the monk's hand to a pocket, move the pointer over the empty pocket and click the left button.

To retrieve an object from a pocket, move the pointer over the object and click the left button.

To punch out at opponents` and block their attacks click the right mouse button. To kick out at an opponent, click the right mouse button over the monk.

To use an object you are carrying, click on the monk with the right button. A question mark will appear over the monk as he tries to use the object in his current situation. If he finds a use for the object the question mark is replaced by an exclamation mark.

To throw an object you are holding, click the right button with the pointer positioned where you wish the object to land. Objects can be thrown from one screen to the next by placing the pointer to the right or left of the screen.

The Vine

The Vine and its flowers are an indication of your life force. If the Vine withers to nothing you will die. When food is eaten or puzzles are solved the vine will rejuvenate.

The Book of Knowledge

The Book of Knowledge describes your present situation. To read the text move the pointer over the book and click the left button. To return from the text, click again on the left button. The text has many hints and clues in it, so if you are at a loss for what to do next, read the book! If the book is open this indicates that you have either not read this text before or that there is additional information. If the book is closed then there is nothing new for you to read.

The Picture

This miniature screen shows the way of the Golden Path.

Notes on game mechanism of Golden Path

Puzzles

Progress through the game is rewarded with extra vine power. This can be by solving a puzzle, using an object, reading a character's message etc. The rate at which the vine withers increases with time, but any success in the game will arrest the increase in the wither rate. If the player chooses to cheat and restart his game from the current position then the wither rate is substantially increased and another goblin is allowed to chase you. Unenlightened behaviour, like kicking the starving man, withers your vine even more. The vine healing mechanisms in the game that can be repeated halve in effectiveness every time they are used.

The Goblins *

These nasty little fellows keep the monk from resting through the game. If the monk remains on the same screen for too long then more goblins will arrive. How many appear depends on how many puzzles the player has solved. At the start only one appears.

The Book of Law

When you use the Book of Law, a clue is given which can be read from the pages of the Book of Knowledge. The book will appear several times throughout the game, giving a different clue each time. All clues appear in order from the start of the game.

* Goblins may not appear on other versions of this game

Programme © 1986 Magic Logic Limited
Published by Firebird Licencees Inc.

UK & Europe
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London WC1A 1PS

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All original music written by A. Selinger
© World Wide 1986 Hobo Railways
Music Publishing Limited

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Printed in England by

CREATIVE PRINTING

Aston Works, Back Lane, Aston, Witney, Oxon. OX8 2DQ